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Guns And Butter

While Senate debate over the SALT II treaty gives indications of continuing for a long time, and we think rightly so, there are emerging other factors which may have an effect on the relative military strength of the two great superpowers.

In a congressional briefing, Admiral Stansfield Turner, CIA Director has lowered projections of Soviet economic growth from a four percent figure last year to a new one of three percent.

And Turner has made a startling prediction that Russian economic growth may dwindle to one percent in the 1980s. Such a decelerated growth rate is bound to have an impact on the Soviet economy and the priorities which they will establish for the expenditure of their national wealth.

The CIA director said that a very severe winter last year had brought Russia almost to a standstill. It is further expected that Russia, like the United States, is approaching a severe energy shortage.

A severe shortage of grain in Russia, almost assures that it will purchase large amounts of grain from the free world, principally the United States and Canada. And Russian rubles spent for grain are not available for arms purchases.

Russia also is suffering from slow growth of the labor force, plus capital goods, and poor productivity. Its ills seem to mirror those in the United States, at this time.

Russia has been spending a greater proportion of its gross national product on arms than has the U.S. But the Turner projection holds some hope that it is going to have to turn a greater amount of its resources to civilian needs rather than arms production.

This is not assured, of course. In the past the country has not hesitated to lower the standards of living of its people to pour enormous sums into military hardware. Joseph Stalin did not turn a hair over the starving of millions of Ukrainians.

But a dragging growth rate, plus an almost certain petroleum shortage, is going to make the lords in the Kremlin give a little more reason from turning away from an all-out arms race towards the needs of their countrymen.

This coupled with the certainty that the leaders in the Russian Communist party are coming close to the time when age will make their replacement absolutely necessary may be a deterrent to massive military spending.

And if they continue to need massive grain shipments from the free world, we would think it unlikely that they would enter into warfare against those who feed them.